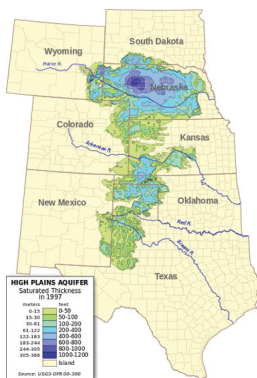


By ELLY GRIMM

• Leader & Times

Around the world, there are several odd holidays celebrated – Penguin Awareness Day, Backwards Day and National Frozen Food Day. One odd holiday, however, strives to emphasize the importance of one of the most crucial elements on Earth – World Water Day.

World Water Day, which is Saturday, strives to attract attention to conservation and development of water resources.



While the City of Liberal doesn't actually celebrate World Water Day, water is a very important part of the city's history. In fact, Liberal got its name from a spirit of hospitality and generosity.

In the 1880s, water was a rare commodity in Southwest Kansas, and eventually, a man named

S.S. Rogers granted permission to use his well, and people always offered to pay for the privilege, to which he said “water is always free here,” to which visitors replied “That’s mighty liberal of you.” This helped the area become known as “the Liberal well.”

Liberal’s water continues to maintain its high quality with testings twice a month, which always have come back negative for harmful disease-causing pathogens such as coliform and e-coli. The most recent tests were conducted on March 11

Liberal’s water is also disinfected daily with chlorine gas. The gas is injected into a vacuum of water flowing through a pipe. Once the gas is introduced in the water, the chlorine turns into liquid and is able to kill the pathogens in the water supply. Calvin Burke, director of water services, says that this method is far more effective than other disinfecting methods, such as household bleach.

“There are some small systems that use household bleach but the gas is 100 percent chlorine whereas if you went to Walmart and buy a jug of bleach, it’s only like 6 percent chlorine so it takes a lot more,” he explained. “We could buy commercial bleach up to about 12 percent but it’s more costly and less effective than using the gas.”

This disinfectant process occurs with every gallon pumped through the city. Burke also says that the quality of Liberal’s groundwater is very good and the department has not received any complaints about the water’s quality.

Burke also addressed conservation methods, including the water supply of the Ogallala aquifer.

“One of the reasons is we keep pumping more water out of it,” he said. “But the thing is is that it’s slow to recharge and it doesn’t replenish like some of the other areas do – you can pump a million gallons a day and overnight it’s going to replenish that million.”

Burke also said that just a little common sense goes a long way with conservation efforts in households and talked about a couple household items to watch for, such as toilets and kitchen sinks.

“Another thing is to not water in the heat of the day along with common-sense things,” he said. “One of the key things is to always pay attention to your water bill.”

Burke said that these conservation efforts could help should drought conditions arise similar to those recently seen in California.

“That’s a hard one to nail because you just don’t know,” he acknowledged. “One of the key things whenever you go to a conference or water operator, the one key thing they always tell you is that there’s not a water shortage – the Earth has the same amount of water it’s always had, but unfortunately, we have polluted a lot of it so it’s not safe to drink.

Another unfortunate note that Burke brought up is how rain isn’t always delivered to the areas that need it. Burke says these cycles simply tend to happen.

“Like when California was in a drought, Africa was flooding, and usually, if you look if somebody’s in a drought, somebody else is flooding somewhere else,” he said. “For some reason, Mother Nature just doesn’t even out the distribution of water so there’s going to be cycles and we’ll get our cycle – we’re going to have wet years, and we’re going to have some dry years.”

“Liberal’s going to be like everywhere else. We’ve got to use common sense in the use of our own water, whether it’s personal or business or school – common sense goes a long way.”